

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 EAE-00 DHA-02 DPW-01 PM-04

NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03 IO-11 SCS-03 SCA-01 SSO-00

NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PA-01 PRS-01 /078 W

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O R 041725Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8467

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 06605

E.O. L1652: XGDS-1

TAGS: CASC, PFOR, VN

SUBJECT: REPATRIATION OF FRENCH REMAINS FROM NORTH VIET-
NAM

REF: STATE 049882

SUMMARY. EMBOFF DISCUSSED WITH QUAI FRENCH REPATRIATION
OF REMAINS FROM NORTH VIETNAM. FRENCH HAVE BEEN VERY
COOPERATIVE AND PROVIDED ANSWERS TO MOST OF THE QUESTIONS
POSED BY WASHINGTON. THEY HAVE OFFERED TO PROVIDE ANY
FURTHER DETAILS WHICH ARE NEEDED. ALTHOUGH THE US AND
FRENCH PROBLEMS ARE VERY DIFFERENT, THE FRENCH BELIEVE
THAT THE US MAY ENCOUNTER SOME OF THE BASIC PROBLEMS
FROM THE VIETNAMESE: BROAD POLITICAL "PAYMENT" TO ESTA-
BLISH A PROGRAM AND THEN STEEP FINANCIAL CONCESSIONS FOR
EACH BODY AT EACH STEP OF THE WAY. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL BACKGROUND: QUAI OFFICER GAVE EMBOFF BACK-
GROUND ON CURRENT REPATRIATION OF REMAINS OF FRENCH
SOLDIERS KILLED IN ACTION. FRENCH BURIED IN CEMETERIES
IN NORTH VIETNAM ARE DIVIDED INTO THREE CATEGORIES,
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MILITARY KILLED IN ACTION (DEAD FOR FRANCE), MILITARY

WHO DIED UNDER OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES, AND CIVILIANS. OFTEN ALL THREE CATEGORIES ARE BURIED IN THE SAME CEMETERY. FRENCH SOLDIERS DEAD FOR FRANCE HAVE THE RIGHT TO BURIAL IN SEPARATE GRAVES WITH PERPETUAL MAINTENANCE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE STATE AND FOR REPATRIATION OF THEIR REMAINS FOR BURIAL IN A MILITARY CEMETERY IN FRANCE IF REQUESTED BY RELATIVES. SOME 500 TO 600 BODIES HAVE BEEN REPATRIATED FROM NORTH VIETNAM SINCE THE END OF THE FRENCH HOSTILITIES IN 1954. IN RECENT YEARS THE POSSIBILITY OF REPATRIATION HAS ARISEN WHEN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE BROKE UP PROVINCIAL CEMETERIES AND FORCED THE FRENCH TO TAKE CHARGE OF THE REMAINS. THE FRENCH HAD NO INTEREST IN THE CIVILIANS OR MILITARY WHO DID NOT DIE IN COMBAT, BUT THE GOF WAS REQUIRED BY LAW TO TAKE CARE OF THOSE DEAD FOR FRANCE. THE VIETNAMESE REFUSED TO BE OF ASSISTANCE CONCERNING THIS CATEGORY UNLESS THE FRENCH PAID ALSO FOR THE HANDLING OF THE OTHER TWO. CONSEQUENTLY, THE FRENCH HAVE BEEN BRINGING TOGETHER IN A CENTRALIZED CEMETERY NEAR HANOI ALL THE DEAD. AT THAT TIME RELATIVES OF THOSE DEAD FOR FRANCE AND WHO ARE INDIVIDUALLY IDENTIFIED ARE INFORMED AND GIVEN THE OPTION OF HAVING THE REMAINS REPATRIATED; THIS IS THE CASE OF THE 32 RECENTLY BURIED NEAR AIX-EN-PROVENCE. SOME 320 REMAINS ARE STILL IN HANOI AWAITING REPATRIATION. IN THE CEMETERY IN HANOI THE DEAD FOR FRANCE, OTHER MILITARY AND CIVILIANS ARE BURIED IN THREE SECTIONS AND THERE IS A COMMON GRAVE FOR THE UNIDENTIFIED REMAINS OF ALL THREE CATEGORIES.

2. THE FOLLOWING ARE THE ANSWERS TO THE EIGHT QUESTIONS IN REFTTEL:

A. THE GENEVA AGREEMENTS AND A RELATED AGREEMENT OF 1954 PROVIDED FOR JOINT MILITARY TEAMS TO SUPERVISE THE EXHUMATION OF FRENCH REMAINS IN THE NORTH AND VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST REMAINS IN THE SOUTH. A MIXED TEAM INCLUDING A DOCTOR WAS PROVIDED FOR. THIS ASPECT OF THE AGREEMENT WAS NEVER RESPECTED, AND THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANY SUPERVISION OF THE EXHUMATION. THE PEOPLE'S ARMY OF VN HAS REMAINED THE DRV REPRESENTATIVE FOR THESE MATTERS. WHEN A CEMETERY IS TO BE DEACTIVATED, THE FRENCH EMBASSY

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IS INFORMED AND SOMEONE FROM THE FRENCH EMBASSY CAN SOMETIME VISIT THE CEMETERY; HOWEVER, HE IS REALLY NOT ABLE TO SUPERVISE THE EXHUMATION.

B. ALL THE BODIES WERE IN FRENCH CEMETERIES, BURIED THERE BY THE FRENCH. AS NOTED ABOVE, THE CEMETERIES USUALLY CONTAINED ALL THREE CATEGORIES OF DEAD.

C. ALL FRENCH SERVICES WERE INVOLVED. NO DESERTERS (OR RALLIERS) HAVE BEEN REPATRIATED. NO REMAINS OF PRISONERS

OF WAR WHO DIED IN CAPTIVITY HAVE BEEN REPATRIATED.
IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THEIR GRAVES WERE EVER MARKED BY THE
PAVN. NONE OF THOSE WHO DIED IN DISTANT PLACES SUCH AS
DIEN BIEN PHU WERE EVER IDENTIFIED BY THE VIETNAMESE AND
MADE AVAILABLE FOR REPATRIATION.
D. REMAINS ARE SHIPPED BACK AS THEY ARE IDENTIFIED.

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THE FEBRUARY CEREMONY WAS FOR BODIES SHIPPED FROM
HANOI IN OCTOBER.

E. SOME OF THE REMAINS IN ALL THREE CATEGORIES WERE
IDENTIFIED WHEN THEY WERE TRANSPORTED TO HANOI. THIS
IDENTIFICATION WAS MADE BY THE VIETNAMESE ON THE BASIS
OF INSCRIPTIONS ON THE CROSSES OR OTHER PLAQUES ON THE
ORIGINAL GRAVES. NO IDENTIFICATION BY ACCOMPANYING
EFFECTS OR MEDICAL MEANS HAS BEEN POSSIBLE. WHERE THE
DRV HAS PROVIDED IDENTIFICATION OF REMAINS OF MILITARY,
THE MINISTRY OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS HAS FOUND A RECORD OF
THE SOLDIER AND HIS DEATH. IT THEREFORE APPEARS THAT THE
DRV DOES NOT INVENT NAMES, ETC. ON THE OTHER HAND,

THERE ARE NO ASSURANCES THAT THE REMAINS ARE NECESSARILY THOSE OF THE PERSONS NAMED. IN ADDITION, WITH THE LARGE NUMBER OF "UNIDENTIFIED", SOME NON-FRENCH REMAINS COULD EASILY BE INCLUDED.

F. ALL THE REMAINS PROVIDED WERE KNOWN DEAD, BURIED BY THE FRENCH THEMSELVES.

G. THE FRENCH HAVE BEEN BILLED BY THE VIETNAMESE FOR THE EXHUMATION OF REMAINS AND TRANSPORT TO HANOI. THE
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THREE CATEGORIES OF REMAINS ARE PAID FOR BY THREE DIFFERENT FRENCH MINISTRIES: VETERANS' MINISTRY FOR THE DEAD FOR FRANCE, MINISTRY OF ARMIES FOR OTHER MILITARY AND MFA FOR THE CIVILIANS. THE QUAI ESTIMATES A PAYMENT OF APPROXIMATELY 4,000 FRANCS PER BODY FOR ALL SERVICES CONNECTED WITH RELOCATION INCLUDING RENTING OF TRUCKS, HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR OFFICERS AND MEN, ETC. NEATLY DETAILED. SHIPPING FROM HANOI TO FRANCE BY THE FRENCH EMBASSY IS HANDLED SEPARATELY.

H. THIS REPATRIATION EFFORT IS THE RESULT OF THE PROGRAM ESTABLISHED IN 1954. THERE WAS A BRIEF INTERRUPTION BETWEEN 1961 AND 1964 WHEN THE FRENCH OFFICER IN HANOI HEADING THE GROUP WAS DECLARED PERSONA NON GRATA, BUT OTHERWISE THERE HAS BEEN CONTINUITY. THE FRENCH VETERANS' MINISTRY IS NOW WORKING ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MORE CONVENIENT AND ECONOMICAL VAULT TYPE CEMETERY FOR THE 15,000 TO 20,000 IN HANOI -- PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE DEAD FOR FRANCE -- BUT IS RUNNING INTO DIFFICULTIES WITH THE DRV. COMBAT INCLUDING US BOMBINGS IN NORTH VIETNAM MAY HAVE DELAYED SOME REPATRIATION, BUT IT WAS NOT AN IMPORTANT FACTOR. "IMPROVED RELATIONS" WERE NOT A FACTOR.

3. FRENCH COMMENTS: QUAI OFFICIALS COMMENTED THAT THE OPERATION APPEARED TO BE RUN TO PROVIDE REVENUE FOR THE DRV. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE KNEW OF THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIAL GRAVE FOR A SOLDIER DEAD FOR FRANCE AND EXPLOITED THIS PROVISION TO FORCE FRANCE TO PAY A SIMILAR AMOUNT FOR EVERY OTHER REMAIN, INCLUDING THOSE OF PERSONS UNKNOWN. EVEN AFTER PAYING AN INITIAL POLITICAL PRICE FOR THE GENERAL ARRANGEMENTS CONCERNING THE REMAINS, THE FRENCH FOUND THEY HAD TO PAY FAIRLY STIFF COMMERCIAL PRICES FOR EACH SUBSEQUENT BODY. THEY THOUGHT THAT THE US WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO DO THE SAME.

4. QUAI OFFICIALS ALSO COMMENTED THAT IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT THE US WOULD BE ABLE TO BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN ANY EFFORT IN NORTH VIETNAM. WE WOULD HAVE TO LET THE NORTH VIETNAMESE DO ALL THE WORK AND TAKE THEIR WORD FOR IDENTITY, ETC. IN ADDITION, THE FRENCH EXPERIENCE

INDICATED THAT IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT WE WOULD GET MUCH
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SATISFACTION CONCERNING THOSE WHO DIED IN AREAS FAR
FROM URBAN CENTERS.

5. MR. CALLEN IS NO LONGER WITH THE AMERICAN BATTLE
MONUMENTS COMMISSION. HIS FORMER OFFICE SAID IT WOULD
CONTACT HIM AND ASK HIM TO TELEPHONE THE EMBASSY. IN
ADDITION, THE QUAI OFFICERS, WHO ARE BEING VERY HELPFUL,
SAID THAT THEY WOULD ALSO FACILITATE CONVERSATIONS AT THE
VETERANS' MINISTRY IF WASHINGTON WISHES FURTHER DETAILS
CONCERNING THE FRENCH EXPERIENCE.

6. WE SHALL BE DISCUSSING THESE PROBLEMS WITH DR.
SHIELDS ON MARCH 5.
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